

Levitation in Early Buddhist Discourse

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In the present paper I examine selected reports in early Buddhist literature of levitation, in the sense of the ability of a human being to rise up into space and at times traverse even considerable distances by supernormal means.

Departure by Levitation

The present paper complements another paper in which I have studied the performance of fire miracles. Two instances from that paper are in fact of direct relevance to my present topic. One of these two instances is the *Pāṭika-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, which takes its occasion from a monk wanting to leave the Buddhist fold because the Buddha has not displayed any miracles.¹ The episode relevant to my present purposes describes the Buddha's departure from the park of an ascetic by the name of Pāṭikaputta, who, in spite of earlier boasting how he would defeat the Buddha, had been too afraid even to come forward and meet the Buddha. The *Pāṭika-sutta* and its *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel agree that the Buddha departed by flying away.² Remnants of a version of this episode preserved in a Sanskrit fragment,

¹ Anālayo 2015b.

² DN 24 at DN III 27,12 and DĀ 15 at T I 69a26.

however, make it safe to conclude that this version did not report an act of levitation at this narrative juncture.³

The ensuing part of the *Pāṭika-sutta* shows the Buddha pointing out to the monk who wants to disrobe that he has performed a miracle, namely by predicting that the ascetic Pāṭikaputta would be too afraid even to come forward for a meeting. Although such prediction is impressive, for the Buddha to show that he did perform a miracle, an act of levitation would certainly have been much more impressive. This makes it fairly certain that, at the time the passage reporting the Buddha's reference to his successful prediction in order to document his performance of a miracle came into being, the idea that he levitated had not yet arisen.⁴ Besides, since at this narrative juncture the ascetic Pāṭikaputta has been utterly defeated, the performance of any miracle, such as an act of levitation, is superfluous. In sum, the departure by levitation reported in the *Pāṭika-sutta* and its *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel seems to be a later addition to the discourse.

Celestial Travels

Another instance, which I also took up in the previous paper, is a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* that has as its main protagonist a Brahmā. This Brahmā has the conceited belief that nobody can reach him in his lofty celestial abode. To dispel this conceit, the Buddha and his disciples pay him a visit, manifesting themselves seated above him in mid-air.⁵ Unlike the case of the *Pāṭika-sutta* and its parallels, in this case the entire story is based on the ability of the Buddha and his accomplished disciples to travel to heaven. It could not have come into being without the basic presumption that it is possible for humans to travel to the Brahmā world. In fact the *Samyutta-nikāya* version and its two *Samyukta-āgama* parallels agree in this respect.

The need to dispel the mistaken belief of another deluded Brahmā, who held the notion that his realm was permanent, forms the setting for another celestial travel of the Buddha, reported in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* of the *Majjhima-*

³ SHT IV 165.3+4 V5, Sander and Waldschmidt 1980: 178; cf. the discussion in Schlingloff 2015: 94 note 30 and Anālayo 2015b: 24.

⁴ This has already been noted by Weller 1922/1987: 635f.

⁵ SN 6.5 at SN I 144,14, SĀ 1196 at T II 324c21, and SĀ² 109 at T II 412c22.

nikāya and its parallels.⁶ Here, too, the Buddha has to be able to ascend to the heavenly dwelling place of this Brahmā in order to provide a meaningful setting for delivering a teaching on the nature of this realm. In fact part of this teaching takes the form of the Buddha disappearing from the sight of Brahmā and his assembly, a feat that Brahmā had earlier attempted unsuccessfully. The entertaining idea of such celestial “hide-and-seek” of course presupposes the Buddha’s supernormal abilities.

Another example of the Buddha’s celestial travels is a visit paid to the Pure Abodes, described similarly in a discourse in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and its parallels in Sanskrit fragments and in Chinese translation.⁷ The *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama* versions report that the visit was motivated by the Buddha’s reflection that during his past lives he had been born in all kind of places, except for the Pure Abodes.⁸ Such a reflection makes it indeed natural for the Buddha to decide to visit the Pure Abodes, thereby complementing his knowledge of the different realms of existence.

Unlike this visit to the Pure Abodes, in general meetings with *devas* do not necessarily require that the Buddha ascend to heaven. Such meetings could also take place by way of the *devas* descending to earth to meet the Buddha. An example illustrating this possibility involves a group of *devas* from the Heaven of the Thirty-three who speak in front of the Buddha in praise of the four limbs of stream-entry. Whereas according to the *Samyutta-nikāya* version the Buddha had come to visit their celestial abode, according to a *Samyukta-āgama* parallel the *devas* had rather come to visit the Buddha.⁹

Yet in other cases it is an indispensable requirement for the whole tale to work that the Buddha be indeed able to levitate up to this celestial realm. An example would be the Buddha’s sojourn in the Heaven of the Thirty-

⁶ MN 49 at MN I 326,12 (= SN 6.4 at SN I 142,18) and its parallel MĀ 78 at T I 547a16. The visit of a former Buddha and his chief disciple to a Brahmā world reported in SN 6.14 at SN I 155,23 does not appear to have a known parallel.

⁷ DN 14 at DN II 50,10 and its parallels in a Sanskrit fragment, Waldschmidt 1956: 161 (which has preserved the final words of the description of the Buddha’s arrival), DĀ 1 at T I 10b12, and T 3 at T I 158b9.

⁸ DN 14 at DN II 50,6 and DĀ 1 at T I 10b10.

⁹ SN 55.20 at SN V 367,22 and SĀ 1135 at T II 299b17. The same holds for similar conversations between the *devas* and Mahāmoggallāna, where SN 55.18 at SN V 366,12 and SN 55.19 at SN V 367,18 report that he went up to their abode, whereas according to the parallel SĀ 507 at T II 134c25 the *devas* rather came to visit Mahāmoggallāna.

three during a rainy season period. In fact the parallel versions only vary in their depiction of his descent back to earth, but agree that he had actually ascended to this heaven.¹⁰

In addition to the Buddha, his disciple Mahāmoggallāna is also regularly on record for celestial journeys. The *Cūlatan̄hāsāṅkhaya-sutta* reports an occasion when Mahāmoggallāna visited the Heaven of the Thirty-three.¹¹ In the course of his visit he caused the heavenly palace to tremble, an episode that also clearly requires his presence up in heaven.

Another discourse involves an unnamed monk who proceeds through different heavens to ask a question that has kept puzzling him, until he eventually reaches Mahābrahmā.¹² Here, too, the monk's ability to travel from one of these different heavenly realms to the next is indispensable for the plot of his persistent questioning *devas* who dwell at increasingly higher celestial levels.

These instances make it clear that the notion of celestial travels by those adept in meditation has to be considered an integral part of early Buddhist thought, in as much as this has been preserved in textual records. In fact the ability to rise up into the air is a recurrent feature in the early discourses, mentioned as part of the standard description of supernormal abilities that make up the first of the six higher knowledges, *abhiññā*.¹³ The gaining of such ability is part of a series

¹⁰ Cf. Anālayo 2012b.

¹¹ MN 37 at MN I 252,14 and its parallels SĀ 505 at T II 133b29 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a3 (for a translation and study of SĀ 505 cf. Anālayo 2011). Another visit by the Buddha to the Heaven of the Thirty-three is on record in SN 40.10 at SN IV 269,22, which does not appear to have a parallel (Akanuma 1929/1990: 89 lists SĀ 988 and SĀ 989 as parallels, but both discourses seem to be too different to be reckoned parallels to SN 40.10; both also do not report a celestial visit by the Buddha). Visits paid by Mahāmoggallāna to Brahmās (in addition to SN 6.5 and its parallels, mentioned above in note 5, where Mahāmoggallāna is one of the disciples that join the meeting between the Buddha and Brahmā) are on record in AN 6.34 at AN III 332,5 and AN 7.53 at AN IV 75,28; in both cases no parallel appears to be known.

¹² DN 11 at DN I 215,26, and its parallels in *Kaivartī-sūtra* fragment 387v9, Zhou 2008: 5, DĀ 24 at T I 102a26, and D 4094 *ju* 62b4 or Q 5595 *tu* 69b1; cf. also T 1545 at T XXVII 670b29.

¹³ On the notion of such *iddhis* and their performance in Indian Buddhism cf., e.g., de La Vallée Poussin 1925/1980: 98, Har Dayal 1932/1970: 106–116, van Zeyst 1961, Lamotte 1976: 1809–1827, French 1977, Gómez 1977, Jones 1979: 189, Gethin 1992: 97–102, Meisig 1993, Nanayakkara 1993, Gokhale 1994/2001, Granoff 1996, Gombrich 1997: 176f, Kalupahana 2002, Karunaratne 2003, Strong 2008, Clough 2010/2011, Fiordalis 2010/2011, Gómez 2010/2011, Gethin 2011, Clough 2012, Strong 2013; and for the case of such notions in the Jain tradition cf., e.g., Mitra 1939, Deo 1956: 316f, 334f, and 562–564, and Granoff 1998. On “magic” in Buddhism cf. also Reynolds 2016.

of attainments that according to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* and its parallels are within the purview of a meditator who has accomplished the fourth absorption. The relevant passage in the *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* proceeds as follows:

With his concentrated mind that is pure, without blemish, pliant, disciplined, established in the stage of imperturbability, and mentally unified, he cultivates the realization of supernormal ability. He is able to perform various transformations, transforming his single body into innumerable bodies, as well as joining the innumerable bodies back into a single one. With his body he is able to fly, without being impeded by stone walls, and he moves through space like a bird. He steps on water as if it were earth. From his body smoke and flames emerge as if it were a great heap of fire. With his hands he touches the sun and the moon. He straightaway reaches the Brahmā Heaven.¹⁴

As for the ability to fly, the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, a parallel preserved individually in Chinese translation, and another parallel found as part of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* specify that this takes place in the cross-legged posture.¹⁵ The *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* and the *Saṅghabhedavastu* also indicate that the ability to reach Brahmā Heaven is performed by “exercising control with the body”,¹⁶ in relation to which the discourse preserved in Chinese translation offers the information that this takes place by “transforming the body”.¹⁷

Another description of this ability in the *Mahāvastu* relates how the Buddha in a past life as a seer had acquired the four absorptions and the five higher knowledges. The bodhisattva’s ability to reach the Brahmā world is described as follows:

¹⁴ DĀ 20 at T I 86a6 to 86a11; the passage has already been translated into German by Meisig 1987: 337; for comparative studies of the different versions of this discourse cf. also Bapat 1948 and MacQueen 1988. The parallels to the above description, DN 2 at DN I 78,4, T 22 at T I 275b10, and Gnoli 1978: 246,19, mention the ability to enter the earth as if it were made of water, in addition to the ability to walk on water as if it were earth. None of them, however, mentions the ability to manifest smoke and flames.

¹⁵ DN 2 at DN I 78,7, Gnoli 1978: 246,21, and T 22 at T I 275b11 (the Pāli discourse and the *Saṅghabhedavastu* also mention additional solid objects through which the adept is able to pass during his flight; cf. DN 2 at DN I 78,3 and Gnoli 1978: 246,18).

¹⁶ DN 2 at DN I 78,9 *kāyena vasaṃ vatteti* (following B^c, C^c, and S^c, against E^c: *kāyena va samvatteti*) and Gnoli 1978: 246,23: *kāyena vaśe vartayati*.

¹⁷ T 22 at T I 275b13: 變身.

Seated cross-legged in his hermitage, he touched the orb of the moon and the orb of the sun with his hand, and he exercised mastery with his body up to the retinue of Brahmā.¹⁸

Here the performance of these feats must have been envisaged as being undertaken by some sort of mind-made body, enabling the bodhisattva to undertake them while his physical body remains seated in meditation in his hermitage. A similar understanding appears to be reflected in the *Vimuttimagga*, which takes up the question of what happens to a traveller in space if the absorption is lost. The reply is that one simply finds oneself back on the seat from which one had departed.¹⁹

The creation of such a mind-made body features in the same *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* and its parallels just before their description of the supernormal ability to levitate, etc., corresponding to the section translated above from the *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*.²⁰ This gives the impression that the ability to create a mind-made body may have been considered a pre-condition for feats like levitation,²¹ just as the earlier mentioned four absorptions clearly serve as a pre-condition for the creation of the mind-made body, as well as for the other supernormal feats described subsequently.

Travels on Earth by Levitation

Several discourses also report feats of levitation done on the ground. One example is a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* which, in agreement with a parallel in the *Madhyama-āgama* and another parallel preserved as an individual translation in Chinese, describes the Buddha paying a visit to his disciple Anuruddha by traversing a considerable distance. The passage

¹⁸ Senart 1882: 284,4; the significance of this passage has already been noted by Schlingloff 2015: 90 note 3.

¹⁹ T 1648 at T XXXII 442a21; a passage already discussed by Clough 2012: 85.

²⁰ DN 2 at DN I 77,10, DĀ 20 at T I 85c27, T 22 at T 275a23, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, Gnoli 1978: 245,26. Gombrich 1997: 176 explains that “there is much textual evidence that this mind-created body was not conceived of as merely imagined; it is as real as a normal body but made of a subtler kind of matter.”

²¹ This has already been suggested by Franke 1913: 78 note 3: “dieser geistige Körper wird hier vielleicht als Grundlage für die in den späteren Partien erörterten übernatürlichen Fähigkeiten angenommen.”

employs a standard pericope that describes the Buddha disappearing from where he was and reappearing at Anuruddha's location, just as a strong man might stretch a bent arm or bend a stretched arm.²² According to a stanza found at the end of this *Āṅguttara-nikāya* discourse and again in the *Theragāthā*, on a later occasion Anuruddha recollected this visit and described that the Buddha “approached me with a mind-made body by supernormal power”.²³ A parallel to the *Theragāthā* stanza in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* agrees that the Buddha visited him by way of a “mind-made body”.²⁴

Parallel versions to the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* discourse preserved in the *Madhyama-āgama* and in a discourse translated individually into Chinese do not have such an explicit indication.²⁵ According to a parallel in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, Anuruddha instead came to see the Buddha.²⁶ This difference leaves open the possibility that the entire motif of the Buddha flying over to see Anuruddha is not original to this context. Nevertheless, the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* discourse as well as the *Theragāthā* stanza and the counterpart in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* agree with the *Mahāvastu* and the *Vimuttimaggā* in indicating that descriptions of the ability to traverse long distances, just as easily and quickly as bending or stretching one's arm, were envisaged as feats

²² AN 8.30 at AN IV 229,8 and its parallels MĀ 74 at T I 540c29 and T 46 at T I 835c20; on this pericope description cf. von Simson 1965: 92 (§15.28) and Allon 1997: 97–105.

²³ Th 901 and AN 8.30 at AN IV 235,21; on the mind-made body cf. also Vism 405,13 (Paṭiṣ II 210,31 just quotes the relevant discourse passage), as well as the discussion in, e.g., Eimer 1976: 55, Johansson 1979/1985: 35–39, Hamilton 1996: 144–164, Radich 2007: 224–287, and Lee 2014.

²⁴ Hofinger 1954: 113,20: *yid las byung ba'i sku yis*, “by way of a mind-made body”. A quote of this stanza in T 1448 at T XXIV 86c12 reads: 佛身意神通 where I suggest emending the sequence of the characters to become 佛意身神通, “the supernormal ability of the Buddha's mind-made body”.

²⁵ The corresponding stanza in MĀ 74 at T I 542a20 only notes in relation to the Buddha that “with body upright his mind entered concentration and traversing space he immediately arrived”, 正身心入定, 乘虛忽來到. The stanzas in T 46 at T I 836c21 do not provide any indication on the Buddha's mode of locomotion; it earlier describes the Buddha's arrival as involving actual flying, T 46 at T I 835c21: 飛. I have already drawn attention to variations in the reports of this episode in Anālayo 2013: 20 note 34.

²⁶ EĀ 42.6 at T II 754a29.

done with the mind-made body.²⁷

Travel on earth done through a mind-made body would presumably only work for a certain type of visit, namely for visits paid to those who are either *devas* or adepts in meditation and thus able to perceive and communicate with the visitor's mind-made body.²⁸ On the assumption that this might reflect an early stage in the conception of such terrestrial modes of long distance travel, the same idea would then have been applied to other instances, resulting in acts of levitation done with the physical body.²⁹

One example would be the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and its *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel, according to which the previous Buddha Vipassī levitated from his seat under the Bodhi tree to approach the two who were to become his first disciples.³⁰ These two are a prince and his chaplain, who probably should not be reckoned as adepts in meditation at the time of this visit.³¹ In fact a Sanskrit fragment parallel gives the impression that Vipassī rather

²⁷ Demiéville 1954: 380 explains that “certain textes précisent qu’il ne s’agit pas d’un déplacement corporel au sens littéral, mais d’un simple ‘transport’ spirituel”. Schlingloff 1985: 333 points out that the commentarial tradition considers feats like touching the moon and the sun to be done while the practitioner remains at the place of his meditation, “all dies vollführt er, so betonen die Kommentatoren, ohne seinen Standort zu verlassen.” The assumption that the motif of levitation in early Buddhist sources had as its beginning point meditative experiences of travel with a mental body is also in line with what according to Eliade 1956: 4 would be a general pattern regarding levitation in various religious traditions: “c’est donc dans l’expérience extatique de l’ascension que l’on doit chercher la situation existentielle originelle responsable des symboles et des images relatifs au ‘vol magique’.”

²⁸ Examples are when Mahāmoggallāna flies over to visit Anuruddha, reported in SN 52.1 at SN V 294,10 and SN 52.2. at SN V 296,31, together with their parallels SĀ 535 at T II 139b1, SĀ 536 at T II 139c7 (the reference is to his return, the description of his arrival is abbreviated) and D 4094 *nyu* 13b2 or Q 5595 *thu* 46b6, or when the Buddha levitates in order to pay a visit to Mahāmoggallāna, reported in AN 7.58 at AN IV 85,17 and its parallels MĀ 83 at T I 559c5 and T 47 at T I 837a14.

²⁹ Both understandings can be found side by side in SN 51.22 at SN V 282,18, where the Buddha informs Ānanda that he has travelled to the Brahmā world with his mind-made body as well as with his physical body. No parallel to SN 51.22 is known to me.

³⁰ DN 14 at DN II 40,16 and DĀ 1 at T I 8c26.

³¹ The situation differs in the case of a visit paid by the Buddha Gotama to his chief disciple Sāriputta, where according to AN 2.4.5 at AN I 64,30 he flies over to meet him, a feat not recorded in the parallel MĀ 21 at T I 449b10.

employed ordinary means of travelling,³² which is definitely the case in another parallel preserved individually in Chinese.³³

The same basic pattern recurs in relation to a visit paid by the Buddha to Soṇa, who is about to disrobe because his meditation practice has not been successful. This detail also makes it fairly probable that he was not a meditative adept able to perceive mind-made bodies. According to the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and the Dharmaguptaka and Theravāda *Vinayas*, the Buddha traversed the distance just as a strong man might stretch or bend an arm.³⁴ A parallel in the *Ekottarika-āgama* as well as the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya* also report that he travelled through space.³⁵ The Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya* instead reports that the Buddha used ordinary modes of locomotion.³⁶ According to a Sanskrit fragment parallel as well as counterparts in the *Madhyama-āgama*, the *Samyukta-āgama*, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, however, the Buddha had rather told another monk to call Soṇa (Śroṇa) to his presence.³⁷

With this example my exploration moves from stories found only in discourses to instances that have counterparts in *Vinaya* texts, which tend to feature miraculous feats with more frequency than the early discourses. Another example of this type involves the Buddha's departure after having been unable to settle a quarrel among the monks of Kosambī.³⁸ According to the *Upakkilesa-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, as well as the Theravāda *Vinaya*, the Buddha walked away.³⁹ A *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Upakkilesa-sutta* reports that the Buddha

³² Fragment S 360 144 V5, Waldschmidt 1953: 31, has preserved: *[dh]im[ūlam ya] thābhiramyam [vih]rtya yena [ba]n[dhu]matī rājadh[ā]*, where in spite of its incompleteness it seems safe to assume that the passage did not have the pericope description usually employed for miraculous flights and that it would have continued simply with *tenopajagāma*, which is in fact reconstructed by Waldschmidt 1956: 149 (§10b1).

³³ T 3 at T I 156c18.

³⁴ AN 6.55 at AN III 374,19, T 1428 at T XXII 844b13, and Vin I 182,11.

³⁵ EĀ 23.3 at T II 612a29 and T 1425 at XXII 481c18.

³⁶ T 1421 at T XXII 146a27 reports that the Buddha came down from the mountain where he was staying and, after an exchange with Ānanda, approached Soṇa.

³⁷ Waldschmidt 1968: 775 (which has preserved the description of Śroṇa approaching the Buddha and paying respect), MĀ 123 at T I 612a8, SĀ 254 at T II 62b29, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, Gnoli 1978: 142,16.

³⁸ I have already discussed this instance in Anālayo 2015a: 10f.

³⁹ MN 128 at MN III 154,28, EĀ 24.8 at T II 629a13, and Vin I 350,15.

flew away, a feat also recorded in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayas*, as well as in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese.⁴⁰

Variations regarding the Buddha's form of locomotion can also be observed in relation to an episode in *Vinaya* texts concerning a monk who had not come for the *uposatha* observance.⁴¹ In the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Theravāda *Vinayas* the Buddha flew over to call on him personally,⁴² but in the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya* he instead sent a monk to summon him.⁴³

An apparent tendency to improve on the Buddha's abilities can even be seen in the comparatively rare instances where the parallels agree that an act of levitation with the physical body took place. This holds for the *Dīrgha-āgama* and *Madhyama-āgama* parallels to the *Udumbarikasīhanāda-sutta*. Here the Buddha departs, after an unsuccessful attempt to convince some ascetics to accept his teachings, by flying away, carrying one of his lay disciples along with him.⁴⁴ The *Udumbarikasīhanāda-sutta* and another parallel preserved as an individual translation agree that the Buddha flew away,⁴⁵ yet they do not report his carrying his disciple along.⁴⁶ In fact the Pāli version continues by reporting that the disciple returned to town and thus clearly did not accompany the Buddha on his flight.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ MĀ 72 at T I 535c17, the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 882c25, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 160a9, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, Dutt 1984a: 186,5, and T 212 at T IV 694c26.

⁴¹ This instance has already been noted by Gangopadhyay 1991: 28.

⁴² The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 818b2, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 121c29, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, Dutt 1984b: 83,8, the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 158a23, and the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 105,15.

⁴³ T 1425 at T XXII 447c26.

⁴⁴ DĀ 8 at T I 49b22 and MĀ 104 at T I 595c7.

⁴⁵ T 11 at T I 226b24, which is preceded by reporting that the Buddha sent out a fiery radiance from his body. No reference to the fire element is found in the other versions.

⁴⁶ Differences in regard to whether the Buddha during a flight was accompanied by his disciples also appear in the *Mahāparinirvāna* narrative of the miraculous crossing of the Gaṅges; cf. Waldschmidt 1944: 60–65.

⁴⁷ DN 25 at DN III 57,21.

Conclusion

A comparative study of reports that the Buddha and his disciples journeyed to celestial realms or traversed considerable distances on earth through the power of levitation gives the impression that at an early stage these would have been envisaged as being done with a mind-made body. Probably as a result of literalism, a tendency that makes itself felt in various ways in the early Buddhist texts and which has led to a range of developments in the Buddhist traditions,⁴⁸ at a relatively early stage this would then have led to the idea that such feats involve acts of levitation done with the physical body.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
E ^e	PTS edition
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Q	Peking edition
S ^e	Siamese edition
SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
T	Taishō edition
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

⁴⁸ The impact of a tendency to literalism has already been noted by Gombrich 1996: 21; for instances that corroborate this observation cf. Anālayo 2008: 379f, 2010: 55–71, 2012a: 160–163, 2012b: 19–21, 2014: 18f, 2015b: 33, 2015c: 11–15, and 2016 (forthcoming).

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